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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
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National Security Strategy
for
Mexico, Central America and Caribbean
(Middle America)

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Seminar M

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 1997		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1997 to 00-00-1997	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE National Security Strategy for Mexico, Central America and Caribbean (Middle America)				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 11	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Introduction

The United States is grappling with the consequences of major shifts in its security environment “The world we now live in is a paradox political integration and community fragmentation; expanding transnationalism, unimaginable wealth and unspeakable poverty, high-tech militaries and low-tech conflicts, decreasing military spending and expanding use of defense resources The United States evolving security priorities must include a workable relationship with our neighbors in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean,”¹, hereafter referenced as Middle America

Since the War of Independence, U S and Middle American security interests have been linked For most of that time, “the United States has viewed this region as a possible arena for subversion or larger conflicts involving non-regional powers--British, French, Spanish, German or Soviet That paradigm remained from our War for Independence, through the days of the Monroe Doctrine, to the Spanish - American War and finally the Cold War ”²

Until recently, most of our Middle American policies fell under the spell of our Cold War containment strategy and contributed to a legacy of U S military intervention Today, with the exception of Cuba, the region enjoys some form of democratic government This fact, together with the end of the Cold War, provides us an opportunity to develop a common vision of security that supports our common interest

¹ Sheehan, John J Preface for Ivelaw L Griffith, ‘ Caribbean Security on the Eve of the 21st Century,’ National Defense University , McNair Paper # 54, October 1996

² Ibid

We now recognize that the greatest threat from within our hemisphere is instability. The United States cannot ignore an unstable region on its periphery, a region that contains our third-largest trade partner and supplies 11% of America's crude petroleum. Our national interest in Middle America through the late 1990's and beyond should reflect a long-range effort to use economic processes to address illegal immigration and illicit narcotics trafficking.

Economic Matters

The United States desires to see trade liberalized in the southern hemisphere in order to build a free trade area. The Latin American region boasts a large and growing market with a present population of approximately 470 million that is projected to exceed 750 million by 2010. Over one-quarter of this population is in Mexico, and U.S. trade with the region has doubled since 1985. Last year, U.S. exports to Middle America exceeded those to Eastern Europe, and gross domestic product in this area is expected to grow five percent annually through at least 2000. Because of exports to the region, the U.S. has been able to create over one million new jobs, and this number will more than double by 2007.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) serves as the benchmark for our trade agreements. An open market in Middle America that is built upon the regulations of NAFTA would level the playing field and lock open these markets for the U.S.

Middle America has few resources and requires more new jobs than it is currently creating to keep up with its rapid population growth. When NAFTA was passed in 1993,

Mexico became a more attractive investment site than Central America and the Caribbean. NAFTA granted Mexico greater market access to the U S than that enjoyed by the Caribbean and Central America. Mexico's 2,000 - mile border with the U S also made it a more attractive locale for manufacturing plants given the lower cost of transportation. This has spurred trade and investments away from Central America and the Caribbean towards Mexico and created slower growth in the region, creating social turmoil and illegal migration to the U S ³

To improve trade between the United States and Middle America, the U S should focus on reducing trade barriers throughout Middle America, and "foster increased economic integration, including financial, telecommunications, transportation and energy linkages, forward looking investment agreements and financial market reforms" ⁴ The prospect of broadening NAFTA to include countries other than Mexico and Canada is the single most important incentive to economic and social reform in this region. It would encourage an increase in trade and investment flow to these small and fragile economies. It is unfortunate, given the political situation in Congress and the misinformation provided by lobbyist and the media on NAFTA, that it will be an uphill battle to pass legislation to expand NAFTA in the near future.

Democratization/Security

Democratic rule and forms of government are taking hold in each country in the region with the single exception of Cuba. Though the democracies do not necessarily

³ Holmes, Kim R. and Moore, Thomas G. "Restoring American Leadership" A U S Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint, p 92

⁴ Cope, John "Western Hemisphere," In Strategic Assessment 1995 (Washington, DC: Institute for National Studies, 1995), p 91

mirror our U S system of governance, the basic underpinnings do exist. The establishment of fair, representative and enduring democratic governments with market economies is essential to build greater confidence both within as well as external to the region. Democratic forms of governance will also tend to make more reliable and cooperative partners in diplomatic matters and trade, creating a more stable domestic environment which discourages migration.

Continued collaboration between states is a practical necessity as well as a political desire to further democracy in Middle America. At the Miami Summit in December 1994, leaders from the U S and 34 other Western Hemisphere nations agreed to 23 prioritized initiatives to "create transparent and accountable institutions, accessible and independent judiciaries, attacking corruption, and attending to the needs of vulnerable groups (indigenous people, the disabled, minorities and others) " ⁵ "Specific achievements include the world's first anti-corruption convention, as well as agreements on cooperation to fight terrorism, to combat money laundering and to establish a hemisphere-wide capital markets committee to liberalize financial markets, improve financial cooperation, and help reduce currency instability " ⁶ The United States must vigorously embrace these initiatives and stimulate to the best of our abilities these continued reforms.

Migration

The growing wave of legal and illegal immigrants from the Southern Hemisphere continues, with approximately 3 million immigrants entering the U S each year. "The majority are Mexican and return to their own country within a year. However, 400,000 -

⁵ Department of Defense, "United States Security Strategy for the Americas," p 11

⁶ Davidow, Jeffrey, "Latin America and U S Policy " Remarks to Inter-American Development Bank Forum on the Americas, Washington, D C , 12 November, 1996

500,000 remain in the U S to establish permanent residence. The majority are poor, lacking both job skills and formal education.”⁷ In California, Florida and the southwestern border states of the U S this migration has created destabilizing political and socioeconomic problems - public health, education, smuggling and street violence. The ground swell of opposition to new migrants is increasing, an example of this is the recently passed Proposition 178 in California. It is based less upon concerns about competition for jobs, but rather upon the skyrocketing cost of the social programs.

The U S / Mexican border is too long, vast and open to stop illegal immigrants from entering the United States. “While the flow of illegal immigrants can be reduced by reforming immigration laws, increasing the size of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and legalizing the status of seasonal migrant workers who move back and forth between Mexico and the U S, this does not provide a long term solution.”⁸

Illegal immigrants are fleeing Middle America due to the lack of economic opportunity in their own countries. The U S needs to lead the expansion of free trade in this hemisphere and help Middle America open their economies more rapidly. These countries have to be encouraged to adopt economic, political, and legal reforms that protect property rights and increase economic opportunities. Only this can produce a long term solution and reduce illegal immigration.

Narcotics

It is Middle America’s misfortune to be geographically located between the worlds’ most lucrative market for narcotics and the source of the best selling illicit drug,

⁷ Holmes and Moore, p 95

⁸Ibid

cocaine The region has become a conduit for cocaine and other drugs flowing to the U S The detrimental effects of the drug trade upon the American people has prompted the U S government to take action U S countermeasures are wide-ranging but not necessarily substantive They include increased law enforcement, education, and drug rehabilitation programs. Unfortunately, these measures have had little effect on reducing the demand for illegal drugs

Working in collusion with sometimes corrupt military and police officials, drug traffickers have developed strategic alliances in recent years that have turned Central America into a major transportation and warehousing conduit for shippers Drug traffickers have also expanded their transportation routes and money laundering activities to numerous islands in the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico The U S has downgraded international anti-drug operations since 1993, during which time the Colombian and Mexican drug cartels expanded their presence in the Western hemisphere

To counter the growing power and influence of these drug cartels, we need to

- “Increase the resources the U S earmarks for international counter-drug operations
- Negotiate multilateral law enforcement arrangements with key drug production and drug-transit countries
- Establish reciprocal extradition arrangements and push for tough sentencing standards, more asset seizures, and improved money laundering laws
- Build an effective intelligence sharing mechanism ”⁹

⁹ Ibid

What the U S Congress and the public also has to recognize is that while there maybe corruption in the countries south of the border due to drug trafficking, the U S must reduce its demand for illegal narcotics and not take the imperialist viewpoint of just blaming the producers and traffickers

Environment

The transnational threats to economic and social development include environmental degradation in addition to the narcotics related activities, all of which have a destabilizing effect upon development of the region. Protection of the environment must remain high on our agenda for the region. Several decades of chemical abuse in both agriculture and industry, and continued deforestation, persist as valid concerns. Rapid urbanization, lack of effective pollution abatement systems and poor enforcement of regulations are responsible for deterioration in most metropolitan Middle American cities. Sanitary infrastructures have been unable to keep pace with population growth, and the effects of air and water pollution are being felt along the United States borders.

NAFTA requires that firms built in Mexico must meet U S environmental standards within the next fifteen years, however the responsibility for regulation rests with Mexico. Educational programs coupled with continued commitment by Mexico's government and the White House must persist for these requirements to become realities. It has taken thirty to forty years and billions of U S dollars for us to come to grips with our own environmental problems, and it may be difficult to expect Middle America to address this issue and make it a priority in the near future.

Conclusion

Current U S national strategy towards Middle America is at best a complacent recognition of our National Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. A robust policy which is clear and concise is necessary for Middle America to proceed towards its potential. We should not continue to muddle along, taking advantage of peace in the area and continuing to deplete the region's natural resources. This will only lead to instability and increased transnational threats that will affect the economic well being and welfare of our nation. Recognizing that we have resource limitations now and in the future, we should

Persuade the American people and Congress that stability and security in Middle America is a U S. national security interest rather than just a domestic issue for Middle American governments, today and in the projected future.

Designate an interagency task force headed jointly by the deputy secretaries of State and Commerce, with Presidential and bi-partisan Congressional support, to develop policy consensus and to coordinate economic programs, democratization initiatives and transnational issues. This agency would represent the U S in international as well as regional forums and leverage the security and development of this region, using the priorities established at the Miami Summit as a model.

Our economic objectives should be to promote

- Integration through open and fair trade policies and practices

- Fast-track membership in NAFTA, to include all Middle American countries (except Cuba), and to build upon the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)
- Pressure the WTO, IMF, IADB and World Bank to encourage private and public infrastructure investment in Middle America

To strengthen democracy and respect for human rights in Middle America, we should tie membership in NAFTA and the FTAA to continuance of democratic reforms, persistent improvement of judicial systems, and civilian control of the military. The Department of State must also reverse itself and increase emphasis on and resources devoted to diplomatic missions (embassies/USIA/USAID) in this region.

The United States should continue the withdrawal of permanently-based U S forces and establish a Partnership for Peace initiative for Middle America with emphasis on civil-military issues and counter-insurgency.

The most pressing transnational issue for the U S is that of migration and illegal immigration; this can only be solved with economic reforms and increased opportunities for Middle America. While at the same time industrial growth must be regulated by actively enforced environmental standards.

Congress should fully support and allocate the required resources to execute a new U S drug strategy that will include multilateral law enforcement arrangements. Middle American governments need to be persuaded to adopt tougher sentencing standards, increase asset seizures, and improve money laundering laws to discourage illegal narcotic traffic.

While the U S goal is to see Cuba peacefully transition into a free-market democracy, we must make it clear to them that we will not tolerate hostile acts against American citizens “The Helms-Burton Act is working and should continue to be enforced ”¹⁰

Stability and economic prosperity in Middle America can be insured using minimal government funding It will require a commitment and execution of this plan of action by the United States

¹⁰ Ibid p 92